

***- Legislation also Includes Huge Increase in Medicare Reimbursements for St. Luke's Cornwall Hospital -***

***- Extends Higher Payments to Dutchess Hospitals, and Ensures All Hospitals in the Region are Paid Fairly -***

Washington, DC – U.S. Rep. John Hall (D-NY19) today joined a majority in the House of Representatives in support of legislation to provide health care to 11 million low-income children nationwide and strengthen Medicare. The Children's Health and Medicare Protection (CHAMP) Act was approved by a vote of 225-204. The bill will protect coverage for an estimated 688,400 children in New York State and contains special provisions authored by Hall and U.S. Rep. Maurice Hinchey (D-NY20) to make Hudson Valley hospitals stronger financially.

"No child should ever go without medical care," said Hall. "I was proud to back a plan to strengthen Hudson Valley hospitals and give 11 million children the care they deserve. This will move us closer to providing every child in our nation with high quality health care."

The CHAMP Act reauthorizes the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and protects coverage for six million children across the country. It also gives states resources to provide coverage to 5 million more low-income children who already qualify, covering a total of 11 million children. CHIP was established on a bipartisan basis in 1997 by President Clinton and Congress, but must be reauthorized by September 30, 2007. If the program is not reauthorized by September 30, 6 million children nationwide could lose their health care.

The CHAMP Act also includes provisions to strengthen Medicare, control out of pocket costs for seniors and help ensure seniors have access to the doctors of their choice by stopping a scheduled 10 percent payment cut to doctors. Additionally, the legislation ends massive overpayments to private health organizations like HMOs and makes a series of preventative screenings free for Medicare beneficiaries.

"The CHAMP Act will help ensure seniors see the doctor they trust and get the care they need," Hall said. "The legislation we passed today makes Medicare stronger and helps prevent seniors from being stuck with a higher bill at the doctor's office."

The bill passed today also includes key provisions that Hall and Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY22) pushed for to ensure all Hudson Valley hospitals are paid fairly. Hospitals receive an adjustment to their Medicare reimbursement rates according to their geographic location, average wages, and commuting patterns to other regions. The legislative provisions authored by Hinchey and included in the legislation include the following:

- Under current law, Dutchess County hospitals and all Orange County hospitals except for the St. Luke's-Cornwall Hospitals are paid at the New York City rate, which is 132 percent of the national average. The legislation that allowed those hospitals to receive the New York City rate is due to expire on September 30, 2007, but the CHAMP Act extends their ability to receive the higher rate through September 30, 2009.

- Under current law, St. Luke's Cornwall Hospitals in Newburgh and Cornwall are paid by Medicare at the Nassau-Suffolk County regional rate, which is 127 percent of the national

average. As the result of a special CHAMP Act provision, these hospitals will soon receive the New York City reimbursement rate, a 4 percent increase.

“Medicare has been treating St. Luke’s Cornwall Hospital unfairly for years,” said Hall. “This reclassification will strengthen the hospital’s viability and place it on a level playing field with surrounding hospitals. Now that we’re fixing the problem with its reimbursement rate, St. Luke’s Cornwall will be even more competitive in providing quality patient care to New York’s fastest-growing county.”

The legislation passed today is endorsed by a wide range of organizations including the AARP, American Medical Association, Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, Catholic Health Association, Center for Medicare Advocacy, Child Welfare League of America, Children’s Defense Fund, Church Women United, and Families USA.

“The most important pro-life thing the Congress can do right now is to insure that the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) is reauthorized,” said Sister Carol Keehan, President of the Catholic Health Association of the US.

-30-